

ever becoming homeless once they leave the military. With the rapidly increasing number of women veterans, the bill also instructs the VA to make their programs for homeless veterans more accommodating for female veterans.

I was proud to introduce these important provisions, and I thank the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD), for bringing this bill to the floor and their leadership on this issue. These brave American veterans, who once faced down our enemies, shouldn't have to face one more night out on the street.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would just say H.R. 2874, as amended, would establish a number of meaningful improvements that would help VA to provide better care for our Nation's veterans. Once again, I support my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Again, I thank Mr. MILLER and Mr. MICHAUD for their leadership on the bill and all the Members on both sides of the aisle that have contributed to it.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2874.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY).

Mr. KENNEDY. I would like to commend the chairman and Ranking Member MILLER for the work they have done on this legislation, but moreover, the attention they paid to our Nation's veterans. I also want to commend the members of this committee for all the work that they have done on mental health.

Mr. Speaker, I have had an opportunity, as a member of the Veterans Appropriations Committee, to sit in on some of the committee hearings on the Veterans Authorizing Committee and seeing the work that they have done to try to increase the outreach to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. I am pleased to see that this committee is starting to do as much as they can to reach out to these veterans as they return from Iraqi Freedom. But, clearly, more needs to be done. We have witnessed that in these recent hearings.

I think that, clearly, the Appropriations Committee has recognized this this year. I am pleased to announce that this Congress has voted the largest increase in veterans health care spending in the 77-year history of the Veterans Department.

Within that, there is an over \$100 million increase in veterans specialty mental health care. This is just one ac-

knowledge of many that our veterans, when they come home, we need to make sure they come home not only in body, but that they come home in spirit, and that it's not enough just to take care of the outer wounds of our Nation's veterans, but we also need to make sure that we mend the inner wounds, the psychological and emotional wounds that they have sustained during war defending our country's freedom.

Mr. FILNER. I thank the gentleman for his leadership on mental health parity in this Nation.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for their leadership on the Committee and for moving these four bills forward to help our veterans. I would also like to thank Ranking Member MILLER for working with me on the veterans' health care bills we are considering today.

I will limit my comments to H.R. 2874, although I support each of the bills we are considering today. H.R. 2874 was passed unanimously by our Committee. It represents a bipartisan effort to address a variety of issues facing our veterans.

Section 2 of H.R. 2874 supports therapeutic readjustment programs to assist veterans in their long physical and mental journey home through a new grant program. Veterans already participate in these programs without any financial assistance or guidance from the VA. It is my hope that this new grant program will increase the number of veterans using these rehabilitative options and that this will enable VA and providers to better assess the benefits of these programs to veterans.

Section 3 authorizes funding for transportation grants for rural veterans. Access to care is a significant challenge for rural veterans. This program will provide grants to VSOs to implement innovative ways of overcoming this challenge. This section was authored by Mr. SALAZAR.

Section 4 provides permanent authority for VA treatment of participants in the DOD chemical and biological testing conducted by Desert Test Center, including Project SHAD (Shipboard Hazard and Defense). This permanent authority was requested by the VA. Section 5 extends collections authorities for the VA until 2009. This extension was also requested by the VA.

Section 6 authorizes the VA to provide expanded readjustment and mental health services in areas determined by the secretary to be underserved, especially peer-to-peer outreach services, for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans.

Sections 7 and 8 come from Congressman PATRICK MURPHY's legislation, H.R. 2699. It is no surprise that Congressman MURPHY has taken a leadership role in helping our Nation's veterans, and I thank him for his work. There are as many as 200,000 veterans on the streets each night. This is a shame on our Nation that must be addressed. The provisions from Congressman MURPHY's bill are critical to ending this shame and helping these veterans find their way home.

Section 7 expands and extends the successful VA program of referral and counseling for at-risk veterans transitioning from certain institutions. The program is extended to 2011 and expanded from six locations to 12. These

services are largely directed toward incarcerated veterans. There were over 225,000 veterans in prison in 1998. I believe it is important that we make every effort to make sure that they do not return to prison.

Section 8 requires the Secretary to ensure that VA domiciliary programs are adequate in capacity and safety to meet the needs of women veterans. Homeless women veterans are an increasing proportion of the homeless veteran population. We need to make sure that facilities are capable of safely caring for this population and helping them get back on their feet.

Section 9 authorizes funding for the Secretary to provide financial assistance to eligible entities to provide supportive services for very low-income veteran families residing in permanent housing. This section comes from a bill authored by Congresswoman HERSETH SANDLIN.

Section 10 changes from 60 days to 30 days the required time for a homeless veteran to be in a VA program before they are eligible for dental care. Section 11 makes technical amendments to title 38.

Overall, this bill continues the ongoing efforts of our Committee and this Congress to address the needs of our veterans and their families. It is my hope that when we return in September, we can work quickly with the Senate to create an omnibus package that includes H.R. 2874, H.R. 2199, Mr. MILLER's bill H.R. 2623, and other important veterans' health care initiatives to send to the President for his signature.

I believe this is a good bipartisan bill and I ask my colleagues for their support.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2874, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PROHIBITION ON COLLECTION OF COPAYMENTS FOR ALL HOSPICE CARE FURNISHED BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2623) to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit the collection of copayments for all hospice care furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2623

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. PROHIBITION ON COLLECTION OF COPAYMENTS FOR ALL HOSPICE CARE FURNISHED BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Title 38, United States Code, is amended—
(1) in section 1710(f)(1), by inserting “(except if such care constitutes hospice care)” after “nursing home care”;

(2) in section 1710(g)(1), by inserting “(except if such services constitute hospice care)” after “medical services”; and

(3) in section 1710B(c)(2), by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting after subparagraph (A) the following new subparagraph (B):

“(B) to a veteran being furnished inpatient or outpatient hospice care by the Department; or”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. I thank Mr. MILLER for bringing us this bill, because working with Mr. MICHAUD of Maine, we have an important piece of legislation that most people would have thought dealt with a problem that didn't exist.

Mr. Speaker, hospice and palliative care is a continuum of comfort-oriented and supportive services provided across settings, including hospitals, extended facilities, outpatient clinics and private residences. The VA offers a complement of hospice and palliative care options as part of a comprehensive health care benefit of provided to all veterans who are enrolled in our system.

Under current law, a veteran receiving hospice care in a nursing home is exempt from any applicable copayments. However, if the hospice care is provided in any other setting, such as an acute-care hospital or at home, the veteran may be subject to an in-patient or out-patient primary care copayment. This policy penalizes a veteran who chooses to remain at home for their hospice care or who, out of medical necessity, receives hospice care in an acute care setting.

Mr. MILLER recognizes this injustice, and through H.R. 2623, corrects the inequity by exempting all hospice care provided through VA from copayment requirements. It would also align VA with the Medicare program, which does not impose copayments for hospice care. At the end of life, veterans should not have to worry about paying for the comfort that the hospice care provides.

It's the right thing to do, and I am pleased that my colleague from Florida has taken leadership on this,

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I thank the chairman again for his willingness to quickly move this legislation to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2623, as amended, is a bill that I am a sponsor of. It prohibits the collection of copayments for all hospice care furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Hospice and palliative care is a continuum of comfort-oriented and supportive services provided across settings, including hospitals, extended care facilities, as the chairman said, outpatient clinics, and private residences. Under current law, a veteran receiving care in a nursing home is ex-

empt from any copay. However, if they choose to take that care in their own home or in an acute-care facility, they could be charged a copayment. VA's current policy would penalize a veteran who chooses to remain in their own home for their end-of-life care or, out of medical necessity, receives their care in an acute-care setting.

The bipartisan support of this bill is greatly appreciated. I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2623, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, once again, I would state that with bipartisan working arrangements we have brought forward a package of bills today from the Veterans Committee which deals not only with our older veterans, but with our returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, and that's what we will continue to do.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2623, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2623, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PUGET SOUND WATERSHED COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PROJECT ACT OF 2007

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3184) to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a competitive grant program for the Puget Sound area to provide comprehensive conservation planning to address water quality.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3184

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Puget Sound Watershed Comprehensive Conservation Project Act of 2007”.

SEC. 2. COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLANNING FOR PUGET SOUND AREA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall carry out a competitive grant

program for the Puget Sound area to provide comprehensive conservation planning to address water quality. The Secretary shall enter into cooperative agreements with State and local governments, Indian tribes, or non-governmental entities with a history of working with agricultural producers to carry out projects under the program.

(b) ASSISTANCE.—In carrying out the program, the Secretary may—

(1) provide project demonstration grants, provide technical assistance and carry out information and education programs to improve water quality in the Puget Sound area by reducing soil erosion and improving sediment control; and

(2) provide a priority for projects and activities that directly reduce soil erosion or improve water quality.

(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to carry out the program.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from South Dakota.

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Puget Sound is home to over 4 million people and numerous species of fish, birds and other wildlife. It is the economic and environmental driver of the region and an ecological wonder. Sadly, the health of this national treasure has been steadily in decline. The water quality is suffering with areas of deadly low oxygen and levels of harmful toxics that are now being detected in some aquatic species.

However, there is hope. The State of Washington has been leading the charge in fighting this problem and working to restore the Sound to where it should be. This legislation will provide critical support to those efforts by developing a comprehensive conservation project to help determine the right conservation planning efforts for local agricultural producers.

It will provide the capacity that local conservation districts simply don't have in meeting the unique challenges of the Sound. This project would mirror others that have occurred or are occurring in nationally important watersheds.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The Puget Sound region is home to diverse natural resource dependent industries, including everything from fishing, tourism and recreation to agriculture and forest products. As an estuary, the Sound also houses diverse fish and wildlife species. The Sound itself consists of over 2500 miles of shoreline and is fed by over 10,000 streams and rivers that run throughout northwest Washington.